

Using Rock and Water to motivate evaluate and monitor engagement – Finding diamonds in the rough. Presented by Jenny Binney

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I will share the diamonds I have gathered in working in this program over the last 6 years. Having taught for 24 years and then set up my own consultancy, continuing to work in primary schools in proactive social skills. I feel like the rock and water program opens students up to the possible.

### **What students say – what motivates them**

Collating student reflections takes time (listening to students in class, reading their self reflections, and their evaluations) but it is very worthwhile and gives me insight into what the students actually take away from each session. When they come back the next week talking about what they have tried and keen to develop more skills, it shows they are connecting with the program. The personal reflections give us a glimpse of the process that has started with some students on the road to self discovery.

We show students respect by:

- noticing the things they have learnt
- noticing where they have connected with Rock and Water
- listening to how it fits with what they do each day

It's like opening up a treasure chest as you find wonderful comments that reflect life lessons. It's a similar feeling I had when my sons started to read words rather than just guessing. When you see students really 'ground' themselves, (and it takes time) then there's that wonderful moment when their eyes light up and they have really achieved 'grounding'. Grounding combines breathing low, blocking other things out, connecting with their own body awareness. They connect with the ground and their life is changed forever – these moments are the diamonds. We see this often in the young people we work with.

As we work on the skills that help with self control, self awareness and self reflection ourselves, we realize how difficult it can be in some situations. We are presented with wonderful opportunities in schools everyday, to test out, practice, rejig our responses – how grounded we are helps us to cope with the complex issues that life throws at us.

This is what students comment on in evaluations.

I like to challenge students in the ways that they react to friends, things at home and in the community – to help them get a picture in their head about their reactions. It is quite mind blowing for some students to realize there are other things they can do rather than fight – others may not still be convinced but at least they have heard and tried some alternatives. You can see by students' body language and the comments they write that having a few alternatives is very powerful. No wonder the bullies don't like it!

I generally go into schools to teach an 8 week block of lessons alongside the classroom teacher. I will use the data from 3 particular schools I work in to give you an indication of what I see and hear. These schools invite me back every year to build on the program at their schools. In these schools I work with the year 5, 6 and 7 students. The collated review is included as an appendix.

In evaluations, the top 10 skills that students comment on are:

- ❖ to keep calm (this rated the highest)
- ❖ to ground ourselves
- ❖ how to stand strong
- ❖ how to relax and breathe low
- ❖ how to be like rock and water
- ❖ stay in control – use self control
- ❖ be flexible
- ❖ how to make myself stronger
- ❖ blocking out and staying focussed
- ❖ using intuition

I always seek feedback to improve my practice and in answering the question “How do you think you will use the skills you have learnt in Rock and Water?” The real diamonds start to appear. They loosely group in 3 main areas:

- ❖ Calm / confidence – eg “ has already helped me in speaking in front of a group”
- ❖ If I was bullied – eg “ to help protect myself and make good decisions  
“being more flexible”
- ❖ self control – eg “ when people try to force you in to it”  
“How to keep my temper”

In suggestions for improvements, generally students comment on how much they have enjoyed the course and say thanks for teaching them. They often comment on improvements they still have to make to themselves, which I think is strength of the program. Sometimes I get valuable comments on how to develop particular activities as you will see in the appendix.

Often it's the individual comments I love most – when students comment on a specific skill that's changed for them. When you know that particular person you know their life is going to be a bit better, a big diamond!

### **How we keep students engaged and the program alive**

Some teachers initially expect a ‘magic program’ and comment that particular children are still featuring in yard or classroom issues – it's a great opportunity to remind ourselves that we offer the skills, some students engage immediately and can transfer the skills, others build strength in the lessons but don't easily transfer them, others may already have strategies they believe are better and may not be as open to change.

An important aspect is to keep modelling the skills as we teach them – our belief, energy and passion about what we are teaching will engage most students. Even if they begin by doing it to humour us until they start to feel how useful the skills are for them.

Remember we are taking some students out of their comfort zones and just like us that needs patience, consistency and practice for it to become part of what they do. It has taken me several years to test out my skills in a range of situations to feel supremely confident now that they are some of the most useful life skills I have.

Working over several years in the same sites shows how important it is to keep building these skills. For Rock and Water to transfer successfully into the culture of the school there needs to be a few common foundations for it to be sustained and embedded rather than an 8 week program that is ticked off each year and put back on the shelf.

If it's just one hour a week and the rest of the week doesn't reflect the same attitude you are only getting a glimmer of what is possible. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- ❖ teachers model strategies that are taught and use the language themselves
- ❖ school values match with self respect, self confidence, self reflection
- ❖ Have fun – I love it when students comment on this; we can be far too serious in schools sometimes!
- ❖ Build on students generating force from their basis – it is a gradual thing, like any other new skill needs lots of practice in lots of situations to gain confidence and strength, students can see its relevance to them.
- ❖ Newsletter articles by students, to show how the skills are working for them.
- ❖ keeping the program alive after the lessons have stopped :
  - as part of class meetings
  - Regular ‘What if’ scenarios where students contribute situations they might not have a solution for and it can be aired anonymously
  - Regular fitness challenge for Chinese boxing or pushing hands
  - build in relaxation time
  - use sporting/news events to highlight rock and water aspects, how people's reactions affect what happens
  - posters/photos (we all need reminders when we are trying to change a habit)

- Build it alongside other proactive programs; we need to ensure we accommodate the range of learning styles of the group we are working with. I use the All About Choice program with younger students and All About You program with staff.

**Keep it simple**

The top rating in evaluations I conducted this year was to be calm – I found it interesting that students love (when they get used to it) standing centred and calm, slowing everything down. Bringing themselves back to calm after each exercise – checking what takes them out of balance and what helps to bring them back. For some students I think it is a connection with themselves, an awareness of what physically changes for them, at times of stress, that they may not have connected with regularly before.

It’s like for some students they realize for the first time it is them that is in control of their body – so simple yet many are quick to blame others.

We know that habits are hard to change and 8, one hour sessions are not going to change the school culture unless there are other things around it ( refer to previous section). I like to have an understanding of the schools values and thread them in to the lessons, so immediately there is a connection with everyday school culture.

I like students swapping partners regularly as it brings up different emotions/feelings and an opportunity to raise students awareness of themselves - so simple. Being alongside students if you can sense a bit of difficulty or apprehension, reminding them of the breathing and grounding can often be enough to assist them. You’ve helped them overcome a block which previously they may have continued to avoid or acted poorly.

I like hearing student stories about what they’ve tried – maybe some things didn’t quite work out, they start to realize there is not ‘one’ correct answer in rock and water, it’s something you have to ‘feel’ and be able to be aware of (the environment, the mood, the stress levels etc.). When students say things like “I need to be more flexible with some things and strong with others”. I call it an Ah ha! moment. The sort of moment that generates a warm glow from the inside, something clicks into place.

**Self reflection**

When students monitor themselves in different situations over a period of time they get a more honest look at themselves. I like hearing them talk about how they rate themselves as they go about day to day interactions. After each session students individually complete a group of questions. Sometimes this may be something to watch in the way they react in situations over the week. This is one example of a rating chart for students to complete each day over a week –

Think about what you actually do. Write the things you did each day that fit for you

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
Responsibility – I have remembered to do things I need to do	Eg. bought diary to school				
Respecting myself and others	Eg. took a deep breath instead of yelling out				

Rate yourself each day out of 10 in the following areas – put a number in each day at the top and then jot down what you actually do.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
rating I am flexible – willing to negotiate (like Water)	Eg. 5 didn't let my sister use my Xbox				
rating I am calm, able to sort things out without losing control (water like)	Eg. 8 focussed on myself and stayed calm				
rating I am strong, I can block out others and not get sucked in or distracted by others (rock like)	Eg. 2 reacted when someone called me names				

Sometimes students won't have a clear example for each day, that's okay, it's raising their awareness of them when they do have an example.

### **Being flexible and strong – what engages students with the program**

The physical aspect of the exercises immediately engages students. Being along side them to guide, encourage and respect their opinions on how they view the world is part of our challenge. It's brilliant when an opportunity arises in class when students have come up with another alternative if something isn't working for them. They start to see the flexibility they can generate, combine that with using their intuition and the strength of the lessons speak for themselves.

As they get better at reading situations they realize how important it is to notice the other person and what kind of reaction is building up in them. Another diamond appears!

Issues that may seem small to us can develop into major blocks if students haven't got the right tools to use. I sometimes feel like a mechanic when I come to a school. Sometimes people just need a regular service, topping up with the good oil! Sometimes there's deeper issues that may be found and fixed and sometimes there's a squeak or problem that you choose to live with rather than fix. For me the challenge is to model what I teach whether it is with students, presenting one day seminars or at home with my family. Each interaction I have strengthens my passion around the skills we offer students through Rock and Water. Building on relationships is at the heart of what we do. Each challenge is an opportunity to learn about ourselves and help students to develop their social manners.

We all see the world through our own eyes – this program allows students to explore their reactions and develop their own strength to take strategies into everyday things that happen. Maybe that's why it's so successful and why I continually find diamonds in the rough that Rock and Water helps to polish a little bit each time.

Thankyou

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